

Lessons Learned in Establishing a Community-Based Partnership

- ✓ **Choose a geographic area.** Start by focusing on a limited geographical area where new work can reinforce current efforts. We felt a local partnership would be ideal. EPA headquarters is close to the communities the Corps serves. Staff and youth all live, work, and play within the watershed.
- ✓ **Find a partnering organization by researching, asking other staff, or engaging local community leaders.** EPA's Office of Water enlisted the help of the agency's Office of Environmental Justice in finding a local partner.
- ✓ **Develop a common understanding of the issues by discussing shared goals.** In 2004, EPA staff met with the President and Chief Operating Officer of the Corps. Both organizations wanted to enhance the water quality of the river and improve the lives of the disadvantaged youth that live in the community. The Corps was also interested in training and tools that members could use in their on-the-ground community outreach efforts.
- ✓ **Develop and implement your outreach plan but be flexible.** Our initial plan was to provide support and to further encourage stewardship of the river by Corps members and the community, to host a series of water quality trainings for Corps members, and to work on environmental projects of mutual interest. The anti-litter campaign was developed to sustain the momentum created by the trainings and give students a creative and fun way to apply their knowledge. Understand that an outreach plan does not have to be static—some of our best ideas for initiatives came from unplanned brainstorming!
- ✓ **Evaluate the program.** We provided evaluation forms at our water quality workshops to help us improve future workshops and determine what impact the training had on the youth. However, with the anti-litter campaign, accomplishments can be challenging to evaluate. It might take years before environmental improvements can be seen in improved water quality. Other aspects of the program evaluation included:
 - How many activities did we conduct?
 - How well did we do them?
 - How many people in the community participated?
 - Did participants show a change in attitude, behavior, or skill?
 - Overall, how many positive outcomes can we identify?

What's Next?

- Phase 2 of the anti-litter campaign
- More clean-up and restoration along the Anacostia River.
- More educational and enrichment opportunities for Corps members.

Who Do I Contact For More Information?

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Youth Lead Community Efforts Toward a Cleaner, Greener Anacostia Watershed

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A federal agency partners with a community-based organization to promote shared environmental objectives, and to support young people in their personal growth for leading environmental education and service to their community.



IN 2004, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) staff from the Office of Water reached out to community leaders in southeast Washington, D.C.—a community a stone’s throw from EPA’s headquarters location—to support the Earth Conservation Corps (Corps). The Corps is a non-profit youth development and environmental service organization. It engages disadvantaged youth in workforce development focusing on restoring the heavily polluted Anacostia River and preparing them for jobs in environmental fields.

► Program Goals

The Corps and EPA created this partnership to:

- provide young people training to further encourage their stewardship of the river and their community,
- expose Corps members to diverse environmental careers or “green collar jobs” that benefit our natural environment (installing solar panels, rain gardens, etc.), and
- support the educational development of Corps members.

► Highlights

Training on Water Quality and Citizen Involvement



The Corps and EPA held workshops in 2005 and 2006 focused on the basics of water pollution, the Clean Water Act, citizen involvement and participation, the Anacostia watershed and its pollution sources, and tools that citizens and governments can use to reduce pollution in the Anacostia watershed.

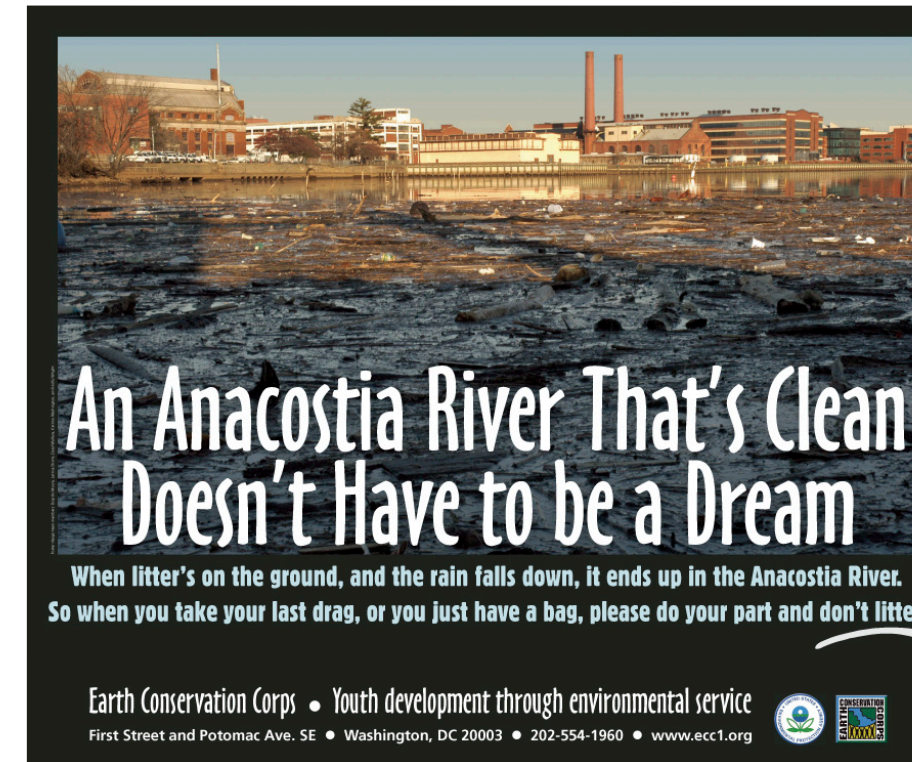
The workshops included a water quality monitoring component, enabling Corps members to go out on the Anacostia River and test water samples for pH, turbidity, temperature, and dissolved oxygen. Corps members “got their feet wet” by wearing waders and using dip nets to collect samples of macroinvertebrates (animals without backbones like worms, clams, crustaceans, and insects) from the riverbank to evaluate the habitat quality of the river.

Through these experiences, Corps members gained a better understanding of their role as advocates for a cleaner and more vibrant Anacostia River. The experiences and knowledge gained from these workshops are enabling Corps members to more effectively share their knowledge with citizens in their community.

Community Campaign to Prevent and Clean Up Litter

Every year, volunteers led by Corps members remove more than 70 tons of trash from the Anacostia River through clean-up events. In 2006, the Corps and EPA developed an anti-litter campaign to focus citizen attention to the litter problem on the Anacostia River and to do their part and put trash in trash cans where it belongs. The campaign kick-off included a poster contest. Corps members worked in teams to brainstorm catchy slogans for their creative posters designed to motivate the local community to get involved in these efforts.

The winning poster was titled, “An Anacostia River That’s Clean, Doesn’t Have to Be A Dream.” Throughout 2006, Corps members and staff used this poster during training sessions for school-aged children and citizens in the Anacostia community. Presentations were designed to raise public awareness of the condition of the Anacostia River and steps that citizens can take to protect it. The poster helped change community behavior—if citizens don’t put trash and litter in places where it can get into the river, annual clean-up events won’t be needed.



In April 2007, the local transit authority—Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA or Metro)—provided advertising space to help the campaign. Metro displayed the winning poster in prominent locations in Metro properties along the Anacostia River watershed. The poster’s message graphically demonstrated the condition of the Anacostia River for millions of people traveling within the watershed and reinforced the importance of simple steps individuals can take to protect the river.



Volunteer Events

The Corps has sponsored several volunteer days in the community, including tree plantings and stream clean-ups, and welcomed the



participation of EPA staff and community members. Special service days have included the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service, Arbor Day, and Earth Day. These events have helped raise community awareness of the Anacostia River and have helped to promote community stewardship.

Environmental Mentoring and Professional Development

Throughout this partnership, Corps members and EPA have provided community youth with educational enrichment opportunities, including tutoring, assisting Corps members to prepare for their General Educational Development (GED) testing, and serving as role models and mentors.

Several former Corps members have been hired by EPA and are continuing to focus on environmental issues such as pollution prevention and lead-based paint awareness. The real-world experiences and training they received as Corps members provided a solid foundation that enables them to perform their jobs at EPA, as well as work toward life-long goals.

Sharing Successes with Other Community-Based Groups

In June 2007, we conducted a session during EPA’s Annual Community Involvement Conference in Jacksonville, Florida. The focus of the session was to:

- present our model for creating community environmental awareness, and for engaging residents of the Anacostia community in environmental activities;
- provide an opportunity for young Corps members to share their real-world experience and views; and
- learn from other community-based efforts addressing similar environmental objectives.

The session was widely attended, and participants made suggestions for promoting the anti-litter campaign in the watershed. Conference participants selected the poster “An Anacostia River That’s Clean Doesn’t Have to be a Dream” for their People’s Choice Award, in recognition of its effective message and eye-catching graphic.